

Hi. My name is Susan Frost and I'd like to tell you about my executive coaching practice. The truth is that coaching has always been part of my strategy work, even years ago when I was a member of the administration at Emory University.

One summer I attended a higher education management program at Harvard. When it was over, I summarized what I learned for the very experienced provost I reported to, imagining how we could apply the ideas to our work at Emory.

Now I cringe at how bold I was to think this seasoned leader would even read my summary. But he did and to this day, I am amazed that he listened!! I was so young, and he was so senior. But we found that some of the ideas were actually very helpful.

Much later another provost who was my strategy client asked me help orient a new dean who was new to the academic world. He was not at home in the academy, and he really did not want to adapt to his new culture.

Our work went well—but it took him a while to believe that working with faculty is different from working with employees in a corporation. His strong preference was to tell faculty what to be interested in. Of course, that never works.

Then presidents began asking me to help their direct reports or their top teams strengthen leadership practices or work together to align the goals of the functional areas to the goals of the institution.

Those engagements never fail to produce useful outcomes. In fact, they have helped me realize that I really love coaching! It's so natural for me to bring my experience and my scholarship to the challenges my clients are facing.

It's also natural for me to help coaching clients lift up the very powerful tissue that connects and enriches the various gains they are striving for. I love that particular challenge.

Recently a long-time president with whom I have collaborated on several successful strategic plans thanked me for teaching her how to make the most of this connectivity. I was amazed because she is so talented. I never thought I was teaching her a thing.

In my role as a coach, I always encourage clients to bring their thorniest challenges to the table for us to grapple with. It's much more productive to take on real, everyday problems than to talk over fictional scenarios. As a bonus, the client gets real work done.

Most coaching engagements begin with six months of weekly sessions—and our first step is for the client and me to establish the goals of our time together. Before the pandemic, I'd usually meet a coaching client once for face-to-face get to know you and your issues session, sometimes on her or his campus and sometimes at a half-way point airport. Then sessions are virtual.

After six months, we usually evaluate to see if our goals have been met and if we need or just want to continue.

Of course, all this is flexible. And after an engagement ends, I'd never tell a former client that I am too busy to help.